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Oceans and the law of the sea

Report on the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects

Letter dated 12 October 2015 from the Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole addressed to the President of the General Assembly

We have the honour to transmit to you the attached report on the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, which sets out, in section II, the agreed recommendations to the General Assembly at its seventh session. Pursuant to paragraph 264 of Assembly resolution 69/245, the Working Group met at Headquarters from 8 to 11 September 2015.

We kindly request that the present letter and the report be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 79 (a).

(*Signed*) João Miguel **Madureira**

(*Signed*) Fernanda **Millicay**

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Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects

I. Discussions

1. The sixth meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, was convened pursuant to paragraph 264 of General Assembly resolution 69/245. The meeting was held at Headquarters from 8 to 11 September 2015.

2. The Co-Chairs of the Working Group, João Miguel Madureira (Portugal) and Fernanda Millicay (Argentina), opened the meeting. The Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, Legal Counsel, delivered opening remarks on behalf of the Secretary-General.

3. Representatives of 51 Member States, 1 non-member State, 9 intergovernmental organizations and other bodies and 3 non-governmental organizations attended the meeting.[1]

4. The following members of the Group of Experts, established pursuant to paragraph 209 of resolution 65/37, also attended the meeting: Lorna Inniss (Barbados), Alan Simcock (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), Enrique Marschoff (Argentina), Beatrice Padovani Ferreira (Brazil), Jake Curtis Rice (Canada), Juying Wang (China), Peyman Eghtesadi-Araghi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Sean O. Green (Jamaica), Renison Ruwa (Kenya), Hilconida P. Calumpong (Philippines), Chul Park (Republic of Korea), Osman Keh Kamara (Sierra Leone) and Joshua Tuhumwire (Uganda).

5. The following supporting documentation was available at the meeting: the provisional agenda, the annotated provisional agenda, the meeting format outline, the proposed organization of work, and the summary of the first global integrated marine assessment (see A/70/112).

6. The Working Group adopted the agenda (see annex I) and agreed on the organization of work as proposed by the Co-Chairs. A number of delegations made general statements, and some delegations announced that they had contributed or intended to contribute to the voluntary trust fund for the purpose of supporting the operations of the Regular Process.

7. Under agenda item 4, the Working Group took note of the report of the Bureau as presented by the Co-Chairs.

8. Under agenda item 5, the Director of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea reported on the status of the voluntary trust fund and expressed thanks to the Governments of Belgium, China, Ireland, New Zealand, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, and the United Kingdom for their contributions since the previous meeting

[1] A complete list of participants is available on the website of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs (www.un.org/Depts/los/global_reporting/global_reporting.htm).

of the Working Group, in March 2014, which had made it possible for experts from developing countries to attend the meeting. Delegates were reminded that, without additional funding, it would not be possible to provide the same level of financial assistance to experts to attend future meetings of the Regular Process.

Consideration of the first global integrated marine assessment, including its summary

9. The Working Group considered the first global integrated marine assessment under agenda item 5. In that regard, the Group of Experts presented the assessment, including the process of preparing it, to the Working Group. The Group of Experts provided a brief history of the Regular Process, outlined the main conclusions from the assessment and enumerated the knowledge gaps and the capacity-building gaps identified in the assessment. With regard to the summary, the main themes were as follows:

(a) Implications for the ocean of climate change and related changes in the atmosphere;

(b) Challenges faced by marine biota;

(c) Food security and safety;

(d) Biodiversity hotspots as magnets for human activities;

(e) Increasing and conflicting demands for ocean space;

(f) Increasing inputs of harmful materials;

(g) Cumulative impacts of human activities on biodiversity;

(h) Uneven distribution of ocean benefits and disbenefits;

(i) Integrated management of human activities;

(j) The urgency of addressing threats to the ocean.

10. A number of delegations made general statements regarding the preparation of the assessment and its summary, as well as the successful completion of the first cycle of the Regular Process.

11. Many delegations welcomed the assessment and expressed thanks to the Group of Experts, the pool of experts and all others involved in the preparation of the assessment and in the completion of the first cycle of the Regular Process. Delegations expressed thanks to the Co-Chairs and the members of the Bureau for their work. One delegation particularly noted the constant challenges faced by the Bureau as it had progressively taken on more responsibilities than had been initially conceived. Delegations also commended the work of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea as secretariat of the Regular Process. Several delegations also recognized the support provided by the secretariats of other intergovernmental organizations, in particular the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme.

12. It was noted that the assessment provided a comprehensive report on the state of the world's oceans. Several delegations noted that it conveyed clear and strong messages about the state of the marine environment and the challenges associated

with its use. The assessment also highlighted the need for coordinated and integrated action to understand and address the pressures caused by human activity. It was also noted that, at the regional level, the value of the assessment was more limited, given that, at least in the North Atlantic and Arctic contexts, existing arrangements for providing scientific assessments and advice appeared to be more sophisticated.

13. Delegations noted that the assessment was intended to provide a baseline and a reference point for future assessments at the global and regional levels, and that subsequent cycles would evaluate trends. It was underlined that the assessment had provided the international community for the first time with baselines on the state of the marine environment, including socioeconomic aspects, and identified capacity-building needs and knowledge gaps.

14. Delegations reiterated that the assessment was intended to provide a scientific basis for policy decisions and not to make recommendations about management or analyse the success of current policies. One delegation noted the importance of the assessment being relevant, legitimate, credible and based on the best available science.

15. Several other delegations expressed the view that the manner in which the scientific work had been conducted and the steering of the process by Member States appeared to have worked well by maintaining a distinction between scientific work and policymaking. Some pointed out that the value of the assessments produced under the Regular Process should not be merely scientific, given that the assessments were to provide a relevant basis for and foster policymaking and decision-making.

16. It was also noted that the quality of the scientific work, together with the broad participation of scientists from all over the world, provided legitimacy and credibility to the process, bearing in mind the need for the continued strengthening of scientific quality. In that regard, one delegation noted that there were substantial differences between some of the chapters of the assessment, in terms of scientific quality, length and level of detail.

17. The importance of broad dissemination of the assessment in order to enhance its impact on decision makers was underlined. It was suggested that the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea could play a significant role in that regard and in assisting the General Assembly in addressing the conclusions of the assessment and analysing the gaps.

18. Some delegations expressed the hope that the assessment would reinforce the importance of oceans to sustainable development and highlight the unique role of small island developing States in managing large areas of the world's oceans.

19. It was observed that the 10 themes under which the assessment had been organized reflected the priorities not only of small island developing States, which faced particular vulnerabilities, but also encompassed issues that should concern all States. It was further noted that the sustainable use and management of oceans and their resources was a key aspect of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development). The supporting role that the assessment could play in the implementation of Goal 14 was emphasized by a number of delegations. The view was also expressed that other Sustainable Development Goals were also relevant.

20. Several delegations noted that sustainable development could not be achieved without the transfer of technology, and that there remained a need to assist small island developing States, through knowledge transfer or other appropriate mechanisms, to enhance their capacity to undertake national assessments.

21. Several delegations expressed concern over the scarcity of financial resources for the Regular Process, recalling that they had supported the consideration of the allocation of resources through the regular budget. They noted that accommodations had had to be made owing to that lack of resources, such as the translation into all official languages of only the summary. In that regard, they voiced their continued support for providing additional resources to further strengthen the capacity of the Division, in particular its human resources, to enable it to continue performing high quality work as the secretariat of the Regular Process. Some delegations recalled the importance of the voluntary trust fund for the purpose of supporting the operations of the Regular Process and announced that they had contributed to the fund. Several delegations stated that they were considering extending the technical and financial support that they had provided to the first assessment, while encouraging a discussion on making the Regular Process more cost-efficient. While acknowledging the need to be cost-efficient, one delegation noted that, despite being funded by voluntary contributions and operating within existing resources, the first cycle had produced an impeccable result. However, it was stressed by several delegations that that model was unsustainable for future cycles, and that a budgetary allocation was important to the continuation of the Regular Process.

22. It was noted that the Regular Process had relied on the commitment of the scientific community. Some delegations recalled that they had contributed experts to the Group of Experts and the pool of experts.

Consideration of lessons learned and the way forward for the Regular Process

23. The Working Group jointly considered agenda items 6 and 7, with a view to addressing the lessons learned in conjunction with the way forward. The Co-Chairs invited the Joint Coordinators of the Group of Experts to report on the periodic self-evaluation of the work of the Group in order to enhance its performance, including the lessons learned by the Group during the first cycle of the Regular Process. During the discussions, the Working Group took note of the letters of 11 May and 7 September 2015 from the Joint Coordinators to the Co-Chairs (see annex II). The secretariat of the Regular Process was also asked to provide a brief overview of the lessons learned on its part.

24. The lack of resources and its impact upon the first cycle of the Regular Process were mentioned by the Joint Coordinators and reflected in their letters to the Co-Chairs. The secretariat highlighted, in particular, the constrained resources that had had to be redeployed in the organization of the meetings of the Working Group and the established institutions; the organization of the workshops in the regions; the support to the Joint Coordinators and lead members in the preparation of the assessment; the transmission of the assessment for comment by Member States, intergovernmental organizations and peer reviewers; the review of the summary and revised chapters leading to the finalization of the advance and unedited text; and the administration of the voluntary trust fund, including fundraising.

25. With regard to the way forward, the secretariat indicated the activities that were to be implemented with respect to the first assessment, including its promotion

and dissemination to relevant policymaking entities and processes; the delivery of presentations at relevant intergovernmental and other forums; follow-up actions in relation to the capacity-building needs identified in the assessment and mandated by the General Assembly; and the preparation of the assessment for publication by Cambridge University Press.

26. Delegations expressed thanks to the Group of Experts for its report and for the lessons learned that had been highlighted and to the secretariat for the information that had been provided. Delegations also stated that the discussion of lessons learned was useful in refining and improving some aspects of the work, with a view to the launching of a second cycle.

27. Delegations expressed their support for the second cycle of the Regular Process. It was noted by one delegation that reasonable time was needed before making the second cycle operational, in order to carefully review, plan and disseminate information on the outcome of the first cycle. Several delegations said that the view that the length, scope, objectives and guiding principles of the second cycle should enable the use of the second assessment to support policy development at various geographic levels and should include explicit references and links to regional assessments.

28. Delegations recalled that the General Assembly had recognized the importance of ensuring mutual support and avoidance of duplication of effort between the assessment and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Reference was also made to other ongoing assessments of relevance to the Regular Process and how important it was to carry out a survey of recent and ongoing assessments.

29. Similarly, it was noted that the second cycle should also aim at ensuring its coherence and mutual reinforcement with all other relevant United Nations processes, including the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea and the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 on oceans. As a concrete step, it was suggested that the assessment could be presented to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at its next meeting, in 2016. It was also noted by several delegations that standardized measurements could help to avoid duplication and improve cohesion.

30. There was general consensus that the consideration of lessons learned from the first cycle of the Regular Process should be continued with a view to the implementation of the second cycle, including by inviting Member States, observers and other participants in the Working Group to contribute by sending their views in writing to the secretariat, by convening one or more informal open meetings and by requesting the Bureau to inform the Working Group at its seventh meeting of the views received and to circulate that information in advance of that meeting.

31. It was noted that, during the first cycle of the Regular Process, Member States had had little indication as to how difficult the process would become as it progressed. The difficulties faced by the Bureau, especially in the latter part of the first cycle, were also recalled. A number of delegations emphasized that some level of continuity in the Group of Experts and the Bureau, in particular among the Co-Chairs, as well as more engagement on the part of the Bureau, from the beginning of the cycle, would be desirable in the future.

32. In that regard, it was agreed that members who served on the Group of Experts for the first cycle would be asked for advice, and the letters annexed to the present report would be reviewed, in the consideration of the lessons learned in advance of the seventh meeting of the Working Group.

33. In addition, the secretariat of the Regular Process was requested to compile an inventory of available information on recent and ongoing assessments and other processes at the regional and global levels relevant to the Regular Process for presentation to the Bureau by the end of February 2016. It was noted that the assistance of UN-Oceans would be instrumental in that endeavour.

34. With respect to the funding of the second cycle, delegations, having noted the significant human and financial resource constraints under which the first cycle of the Regular Process was conducted (see para. 21), considered the various ways in which funding could be provided for the second cycle. The possibilities mentioned included fully funding the second cycle through a regular budget allocation or through a combination of a regular budget and voluntary contributions. Several delegations endorsed the call by the Group of Experts for more resources to be deployed to the secretariat in order to assist the Regular Process. Information was requested regarding the budget constraints experienced by the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea as the secretariat of the Regular Process.

35. The Working Group considered that the overall resource requirements for the second cycle of the Regular Process would need to be prepared in advance of the seventh meeting of the Working Group, following informal open meetings with Member States, observers and other participants in the Working Group regarding the implementation of the second cycle.

36. With regard to the process of appointments to the pool of experts and the shortcomings highlighted by the Joint Coordinators, delegations recognized the shortcomings and noted the importance of addressing the appointment process through regional groups in order to expedite the process. One delegation suggested that there might be a need to either adopt a mechanism to streamline the existing process or to adopt different processes. In that regard, another delegation emphasized that a clear, transparent and structured process was essential for the success of the second cycle. Several delegations voiced support for the appointment of national contact points. Some welcomed suggestions by the Group of Experts concerning the future possibility of a process to electronically transmit nominations for the pool of experts in order to facilitate access to information about the nominees.

37. Regarding participation in the pool of experts, one delegation echoed the concerns of the Group of Experts concerning the limited participation by experts from certain disciplines, in particular the social and economic sciences.

38. It was noted that the interest of scientists in participating in the second cycle would depend on the extent of dissemination and communication of the results of the first cycle to the scientific community and the general public. It was also suggested that summary documents should be accessible to the broader public and policymakers.

39. One delegation noted that, while States had been offered the opportunity to comment on the first draft of the assessment and seek clarification from the Group of Experts, similar opportunities had not been provided in the case of the second draft, especially with respect to newly added material. Another delegation noted

that, while conscious of the need to ensure the scientific independence of the assessment, additional interaction with regard to comments might be needed to satisfy the concerns of States.

40. It was noted that some peer reviewers had found the peer review process complicated owing to differences in quality between chapters and, in some cases, the lack of feedback as to how their comments had been taken into account. It was also unclear whether all chapters had been subject to a thorough scientific technical review before being submitted for review by Member States. In that respect, the view was expressed that there was a need for a more formal, structured and transparent peer review process, perhaps one drawing on existing editorial management systems.

41. Noting the call from the Group of Experts for regional workshops, several delegations expressed support for the idea of beginning the next phase with such workshops. It was noted that the workshops would bring together scientists, lawyers and policymakers, among others, and provide an indication of how different areas of expertise could contribute to the work of the Regular Process and, specifically, to the second cycle. Some delegations recalled that capacity-building was one of the core objectives of the Regular Process, and that workshops had assisted in that regard.

42. The importance of holding workshops for writing teams, which would allow them to meet in person, potentially at the beginning and during the middle of the writing phase, was emphasized. It was observed that regional workshops could help to avoid overlap among chapters. In that regard, it was noted that the scope of chapters should be determined in order to avoid duplication and that standardized procedures for providing guidance for writers, quality control, editorial management and peer review should be included in future processes.

43. One delegation noted areas of the assessment in which existing data were not sufficient or had not been fully explored. Another highlighted the need to further consider gap analysis, while several suggested comprehensive and extensive use of regional assessments to avoid overlap and ensure consistency among regional assessments and the work of the second cycle. One delegation suggested a database-driven reporting system with key indicators/data to facilitate the long-term success of the Regular Process. The importance of defining baseline indicators that were harmonized and comparable across regions and that would allow for integration and consistent assessment of trends in future cycles was underlined.

44. Several delegations stressed that the second cycle of the Regular Process should be more policy-oriented, and subsequent assessments should be drafted to facilitate policymaking at all geographical levels. In that regard, several delegations welcomed the idea of identifying certain priorities, from a policy perspective, among the diverse issues faced by the marine environment. The view was expressed that assessments should be policy-relevant rather than policy-prescriptive.

45. One delegation highlighted the call from the Group of Experts for more inter-agency coordination. In that regard, some observer delegations expressed the hope of receiving a clearer and expanded role in the future beyond a simple call from the General Assembly to support the Regular Process. It was noted that the technical agencies of the United Nations system had a wealth of relevant information and expertise that had not been used to its maximum effect. One observer delegation noted that it had embarked upon the development of a global ocean science report, which

would be published in 2017 and could help to inform the development of a capacity-building strategy under the Regular Process.

Adoption of recommendations to the General Assembly at its seventieth session

46. With respect to the consideration of the recommendations, there was consensus that the recommendations concerning the immediate resource requirements for the Regular Process would be made without prejudice to the informal consultations on the draft resolution on oceans and the law of the sea beginning on 14 September 2015 and without proposing to prioritize the work of the Division.

47. Based on the foregoing discussions, the Working Group adopted a set of recommendations (see sect. II). The Working Group recommended that its next meeting should be convened in 2016.

48. On 12 October 2015, the Co-Chairs transmitted the present report and the recommendations to the President of the seventieth session of the General Assembly.

II. Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole to the General Assembly at its seventieth session

49. The Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole recommends to the General Assembly that it:

(a) Welcome with appreciation the first global integrated marine assessment and approve its summary;

(b) Recognize the importance of the assessment, including for the small island developing States;

(c) Recognize with utmost appreciation the work of the members of the Group of Experts[2] during the entire first cycle of the Regular Process and, in particular, the work carried out with respect to the assessment;

(d) Also recognize with utmost appreciation the work of those members of the pool of experts who contributed to the preparation of the assessment;

(e) Recognize with appreciation the support provided by the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, as the secretariat of the Regular Process, during the first cycle of the Regular Process;

(f) Also recognize with appreciation the important role of the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole and thank the members of the Bureau for their guidance during the intersessional periods;

[2] The members of the Group of Experts are: Joint Coordinators: Lorna Inniss (Barbados) and Alan Simcock (United Kingdom); Amanuel Yoanes Ajawin (Sudan), Angel C. Alcala (Philippines), Patricio Bernal (Chile), Hilconida P. Calumpong (Philippines), Peyman Eghtesadi-Araghi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Sean O. Green (Jamaica), Peter Harris (Australia), Osman Keh Kamara (Sierra Leone), Kunio Kohata (Japan), Enrique Marschoff (Argentina), Georg Martin (Estonia), Beatrice Padovani Ferreira (Brazil), Chul Park (Republic of Korea), Rolph Antoine Payet (Seychelles), Jake Rice (Canada), Andrew Rosenberg (United States), Renison Ruwa (Kenya), Joshua T. Tuhumwire (Uganda), Saskia Van Gaever (Belgium), Juying Wang (China) and Jan Marcin Węsławski (Poland).

(g) Further recognize with appreciation those organizations that contributed to the first cycle of the Regular Process, including the United Nations Environment Programme and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission for their technical and scientific, logistical and financial support;

(h) Emphasize the importance of making Governments, intergovernmental organizations, the scientific community and the general public aware of the assessment and request the secretariat of the Regular Process to make the assessment available on its website and on the website of the World Ocean Assessment, and undertake other activities with the view to raising awareness of the assessment;

(i) Encourage States and invite relevant intergovernmental organizations to fully take the assessment into account as part of various processes, such as the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, and recognize the supporting role of the assessment in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(j) Recall the importance of ensuring that assessments, such as those prepared under the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and the Regular Process, support one another and avoid unnecessary duplication, and the importance of taking into account assessments at the regional level;

(k) Take note of the views expressed by Member States, including members of the Bureau, observers and other participants in the Working Group, the Group of Experts and the secretariat of the Regular Process, on the lessons learned from the first cycle of the Regular Process and of the need to continue the consideration of those issues during the intersessional period;

(l) Take note with appreciation of the contributions, including in-kind contributions, for workshops, the website and support to members of the Group of Experts;

(m) Also take note with appreciation the contributions to the voluntary trust fund for the purpose of supporting the operations of the first five-year cycle and for the duration of the operations of the Regular Process, while expressing its concern about the difficulty in raising sufficient funds for the Regular Process;

(n) Take note of the significant human and financial resource constraints under which the first cycle of the Regular Process was conducted;

(o) Recall its decision that, in the first cycle, the scope of the Regular Process would focus on establishing a baseline and, in subsequent cycles, extend to the evaluation of trends;

(p) Launch the second cycle of the Regular Process;

(q) Request the Bureau to continue the consideration of lessons learned from the first cycle of the Regular Process with a view to the implementation of the second cycle, including by inviting Member States, observers and other participants in the Working Group, through the Co-Chairs, to contribute by sending their views in writing to the Bureau and convening one or more informal open meetings with Member States, observers and other participants in the Working Group, and request the Bureau to inform the Working Group at its seventh meeting of the views received and to circulate that information in advance of the seventh meeting;

(r) Request the Secretary-General to convene the seventh meeting of the Working Group in 2016 with a view to providing recommendations to the General Assembly on the follow-up to the assessment, the implementation of the second cycle of the Regular Process, including its budget and duration and any adjustments that might be necessary in the light of lessons learned from the first cycle, including with regard to resource requirements, before the end of the seventieth session, taking into full consideration the discussions on lessons learned and the way forward;

(s) Also request the Secretary-General to review the resource requirements for the second cycle of the Regular Process and to report to Member States in advance of the seventh meeting of the Working Group;

(t) Request the secretariat of the Regular Process to compile, subject to budgetary considerations, an inventory of available information on recent and ongoing assessments and other processes at the regional and global levels relevant to the Regular Process, and to submit it to the Bureau by the end of February 2016;

(u) Decide that the meetings of the Working Group shall continue to be coordinated by two co-chairs, representing developing countries and developed countries, respectively, to be appointed by the President of the General Assembly, in consultation with regional groups, for the duration of the second cycle;

(v) Request the Secretary-General to invite the Chairs of the regional groups to constitute a group of experts, ensuring adequate expertise and geographical distribution, comprising a maximum of 25 experts, with no more than 5 experts per regional group, for the duration of the second cycle of the Regular Process, taking into account the desirability of some degree of continuity, and in accordance with the terms of reference for the Group of Experts;[3]

(w) Invite individuals who served in the Group of Experts during the first cycle of the Regular Process to provide advice, as required, to the Bureau and the Working Group until the Group of Experts for the second cycle has been appointed;

(x) Consider the immediate resource requirements of the Division, as the secretariat of the Regular Process, within the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017, and to that end request the Secretary-General to submit those requirements to the General Assembly.

[3] See A/67/87, annex III.

Annex I

Agenda of the sixth meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole on the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects

1. Opening of the meeting.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Organization of work.
4. Report of the Bureau.
5. Consideration of the first global integrated marine assessment, including its summary.
6. Consideration of lessons learned from the assessment.
7. Consideration of the way forward for the Regular Process.
8. Adoption of recommendations to the General Assembly at its seventieth session.
9. Other matters.
10. Closure of the meeting.

Annex II

Letter dated 11 May 2015 from the Joint Coordinators of the Group of Experts addressed to the Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole

Lessons learned from the first cycle of the Regular Process

1. When you met the Group of Experts of the Regular Process on 30 April 2015, you asked us to write to you to summarize the views that the Group expressed at that time about lessons learned during the preparation of World Ocean Assessment I.

2. In general, we think that the arrangements of the Working Group, its Bureau, the Group of Experts and the pool of experts have been the right general structure. However, there are many points on which improvements are needed, especially in the provision of supporting resources.

Working Group and its Bureau

3. As the bodies responsible for managing the Regular Process, the Working Group and its Bureau need to have a consistent approach. To begin with, there were relatively frequent changes in the Co-Chairs of the Working Group. This meant that there was a need to keep bringing new Co-Chairs up to speed on the process. The situation has been much better since you provided stability in these roles. While there are always bound to be occasions for change as the careers of appointees develop, we think that there is a strong case for appointing the Co-Chairs for several years at a time, rather than year by year.

Group of Experts

4. We found that the Group of Experts, with just over 20 members, was able to develop a coherent approach to the tasks that it was given, that members from very different backgrounds were able to work cooperatively and that meetings of that size were manageable. We therefore think that the composition of five members from each of the five regional groups has been a sound approach and would support its continuation. Owing to the way in which the arrangements for the Regular Process developed, the Group had to be reappointed several times. Fortunately, that did not lead to any lack of continuity. For the second cycle, however, there would be advantages in having the Group appointed for the full cycle from the start.

5. It has been a drawback that one regional group did not appoint the full complement of five members: it could well have helped to have had three additional pairs of hands for the work.

6. We suggest that, in the future, more consideration be given to the balance of expertise within the Group. For example, for World Ocean Assessment I, it would have been helpful to have had more economic and social expertise. This is likely to also be a need in a second cycle of the Regular Process. For the second cycle, there would also need to be a balance between bringing in new members and maintaining some continuity by retaining some members of the present Group. Achieving a balance among those various needs will not be straightforward when combined with

separate appointments by the five regional groups. Advice from the Bureau could assist in striking the necessary balance.

7. It is essential that members of the Group be able to commit themselves to the work. Three members of the Group have been unable to attend any meetings of the Group. Although those three members have provided some input by e-mail, their contributions have been very limited. Three other members of the Group have been able to attend only irregularly because of their other commitments: this has, again, limited the contributions that they could make.

8. There have also been problems with the attendance of one further member of the Group, who has had difficulties in obtaining the visas necessary for meetings in New York. Those difficulties have meant that he has missed four meetings. In part, that has been because the formal invitation letters could be issued only relatively close to the dates of meetings because the financing necessary for travel could not be assured early on.

9. This problem of lack of adequate notice of meetings has also meant that other members have had to miss meetings because the dates eventually chosen clashed with their existing commitments. There have also been some difficulties with lack of advance notice of meetings arising from the internal processes of some Administrations, which require several weeks' notice to authorize travel requests.

10. In general, the Governments of the developed countries from which members of the Group have been drawn have been prepared to underwrite the travel and subsistence costs of those members. However, related problems may underlie some of the absences of some members from some meetings of the Group.

11. There is a need for further thought on these issues in order to ensure that resources are clearly available well in advance, so that formal invitations can be issued in good time.

Pool of experts

12. There have been major problems with organizing the pool of experts. The pool has been an essential ingredient in producing World Ocean Assessment I. However, we know that many of those nominated have felt that their enthusiasm has not been recognized. Those individuals have lost interest as a result.

13. A large part of the problem stemmed from the mechanism chosen for nominating the members of the pool. This required States to present their nominations through their missions in New York, which then submitted them to the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea through the regional groups. In some cases, missions did not understand the process, and nominations were therefore delayed. In addition, the regional groups and their Chairs (who changed monthly) did not understand the process and often lacked the resources to play their part. For example, in one regional group, it was eventually determined that the mission holding the chair had put a large batch of nominations in a cupboard and forgotten about them. In another regional group, the nominations were initially seen as part of the regular elections process and were held up for negotiations as part of that process.

14. The way in which the nominations were presented also caused problems. Most of the personal history forms for members of the pool were presented to the

Division as paper documents. This meant that it was not possible to search through the forms for people who had publications to their credit in specific fields except by a laborious manual search, for which staff time was not available. An effective electronic system for nominations needs to be established, linked to the subsequent communications system between the Group of Experts and the members of the pool.

15. The problems with the website, discussed below, also meant that it was not possible to get back to people who had been nominated to the pool for the better part of a year. This gave many of the experts the feeling that World Ocean Assessment I was not a serious undertaking, and, therefore, made them unwilling to devote time and effort to it.

16. Communications with members of the pool proved to be difficult. They were, of course, asked to provide e-mail addresses, but messages sent to them often did not yield responses. The reasons why seem to have included changes to e-mail addresses for which either notice had not been provided or changes had not been made to the website record as well as e-mails being diverted to spam folders and a lack of interest. Trying to chase up experts who did not reply was extremely difficult, given that it required a message from the Division to the relevant mission in New York, which then passed the message to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the capital and then to whichever authority was handling the nomination of experts, before it had any chance of reaching the expert. It could be useful if Governments were able to designate a national contact point to facilitate communication with members of the pool.

Resources

17. The question of the resources needed to carry out World Ocean Assessment I effectively was never properly addressed. States, non-governmental organizations and foundations were invited repeatedly to contribute to the trust fund that was set up. Some States made contributions without further pressure, and efforts by the coordinators and the Division mobilized some further contributions.

18. The Group of Experts was asked by the Co-Chairs in April 2012 for an indication of the resources that would be needed. A budgetary indication was produced. That was not a proper budget, but rather a back-of-the-envelope calculation to give some indication of the type of financial support that would be needed and its scale. The budgetary indication was not circulated to the Working Group until several months later and was never discussed. The only resources raised for the trust fund have had to be devoted to meeting the costs of members from developing countries to attend meetings of the Group.

19. The absence of a clear commitment of resources had a wide range of effects. Among other things:

(a) It generated a belief among many of those approached to take part that the whole exercise was not a serious undertaking, and that any time or effort that they might have been prepared to devote to it would, therefore, be wasted;

(b) It made it difficult to schedule meetings of the Group of Experts well in advance;

(c) It made it impossible to purchase information that was only available only from databases that required payment, such as that of the World Tourism Organization;

(d) It made it impossible to organize meetings of writing teams;

(e) It put great pressure on one of the Coordinators, given that it was not possible to pay her Government to allow her to use a specific share of her time for the work involved.

Writing teams

20. It was clear from the outset that it would be necessary to bring in experts in many different fields to supplement the expertise of the Group of Experts. However, after the pool of experts had been constituted, it proved, in many cases, to be very difficult to mobilize experts from the pool to join teams to write chapters. Partly this was, no doubt, due to the loss of motivation, as described above. Partly it was also due to the fact that, while many members of the pool were prepared to act as commentators or peer reviewers, few were ready to join writing teams to prepare drafts.

21. In one case, for example, the 83 experts nominated to the pool who had indicated an interest in the subject were invited to indicate whether they wished to participate as a member of the writing team, a commentator or a peer reviewer. Only 22 responded, of whom only 6 were prepared to be members of the writing team. Of the 12 who were prepared to be commentators to review the draft text before it went for review by the States and peer review, only 7 actually provided comments.

22. It is clear from this that much more effort will be needed in the second cycle to establish and maintain contact with members of the pool of experts. This is likely to require dedicated staff.

23. There were also no funds to provide for meetings of writing teams. Efforts of the Group of Experts resulted in an offer from China of funds for one meeting, but various constraints meant that it was impossible to take advantage of the offer.

24. Those who have participated in writing teams of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have reported the great benefits arising from being able to arrange meetings of writing teams. Not only does it allow for much more in-depth discussion than can be achieved by e-mail exchanges, but it also encourages experts who are less sure of themselves (especially when their mother tongue is not English) to be ready to participate.

Communications

25. From the start, it was agreed that the Regular Process would require a website for communications with the members of the pool of experts and with the general public. Resources were found to establish that website through the good offices of Australia, Norway and UNEP/GRID Arendal. Unfortunately, there was a long delay between agreements to establish the website and provide resources and the actual availability of the website. That delay was due to the need to establish formal agreements between the United Nations Secretariat, Norway and UNEP/GRID

Arendal regarding the legal status of the website. As explained above, that delay probably contributed to a lack of enthusiasm among the members of the pool.

26. Much care went into the selection of Editorial Manager as the software system for managing the chapter texts and communicating with the pool of experts. However, for various reasons, largely relating to the fact that the system was not particularly suited to handling texts in the process of drafting and revision, and that resources were not available for training the members of the Group of Experts in the use of the software, the system ultimately made a much smaller contribution to the work than had been hoped.

27. A separate system, provided by the United Nations Secretariat for communication among the members of the Group of Experts, was not very successful. Initially, the United Nations Quickr system was used. That proved to be slow to use, largely because it required the downloading of a substantial amount of software every time anyone logged in. That system was replaced with Unite Connections, which also proved to be difficult to use. In the end, it proved to be more effective to use ordinary e-mail and the free service of Dropbox. More attention will be needed to be paid to providing more effective means of communication between members of the Group of Experts that will allow them to work collectively on the same document.

Workshops

28. There were eight regional workshops in support of the Regular Process, hosted by Australia, Belgium, Chile, China, Côte d'Ivoire, India, Mozambique and the United States of America, respectively. The workshops were successful in spreading knowledge about the Regular Process and in assembling useful information for World Ocean Assessment I. The host Governments thus made significant contributions to the Regular Process. The workshops could have made an even greater contribution had there been greater support from the secretariat for them. The Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea put a great deal of effort into organizing the workshops, but could not provide sufficient staff to ensure really good follow-up. Furthermore, because the workshops were initiated well before the pool of experts was in place, there were no effective links between the pool and the workshops, which diminished the effectiveness of the workshops. It would have helped if members of the pool could have been included regularly among those attending the workshops.

Secretariat

29. The Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea was appointed as the secretariat of the Regular Process. Given that that task had to be accommodated within the existing resources of the Division, there were limitations on the support that it could provide. Although the members of the Group of Experts had to draft papers and record conclusions for its meetings, the Division was able to provide assistance in that regard towards the end. The technical and scientific support that could be provided for checking drafts, finding material and ensuring consistency was limited. There was also a lack of capacity to make sure that deadlines were met.

30. Efforts were made to get a donation of project management software to facilitate the monitoring of progress. However, those efforts were unsuccessful. It did not prove practical to use Editorial Manager for that purpose, given that its focus is on the later stages of managing a publication. There were no resources to purchase suitable commercial project-management software.

Communication with the scientific community and the general public

31. Although the website was established and populated with much information on World Ocean Assessment I, the resources needed to make it an effective means of communication with the scientific community and the general public were insufficient. Nor were there resources to develop systems of communication through social media. The absence of such methods of communication undermined the task of securing commitment from the scientific community and the general public.

32. To date, it has not been possible to set up ways of communicating the results of World Ocean Assessment I to Governments, the scientific community and the general public. Doing so is essential to preventing the dissipation of the achievements of the assessment.

Recommendations

33. You asked us to make recommendations on how the second cycle of the Regular Process might be improved. The Group of Experts suggests the following:

(a) Member States need to demonstrate their commitment to the Regular Process by:

(i) Seriously considering the information provided in World Ocean Assessment I and taking it into account in making decisions;

(ii) Making proper resources available for the second cycle of the Regular Process.

If commitment is not demonstrated in these ways, it will be difficult to mobilize enthusiasm for the second cycle among the marine scientific communities;

(b) A critical first step towards the second cycle is to make Governments, the scientific community and the general public aware of the results of the first cycle. It will not suffice simply to send a note verbale to the missions in New York, to make it available on the website and to publish it through the Cambridge University Press. There needs to be a concerted effort to draw attention to it, in particular through presentations at appropriate scientific meetings and congresses. Funds will be needed to enable this effort;

(c) Although the overall structure of the Working Group, the Bureau, the Group of Experts and the pool of experts has been demonstrated to work adequately, it would be helpful if:

(i) The Co-Chairs of the Working Group and its Bureau were able to commit themselves to the work for several years;

(ii) The Group of Experts were assured of continuity in the composition of the group throughout the cycle;

(d) While the present method of appointing the Group of Experts has worked well, it would be good if:

(i) The full complement of 25 members were appointed;

(ii) There were more representation of economic and social experts alongside marine science and environmental experts;

(iii) There were a balance between new appointments to the Group and continuation of those involved in the first cycle.

Advice from the Bureau to the regional groups in the General Assembly could help to achieve sub-items (ii) and (iii);

(e) If the Group of Experts is to have coordinators, any coordinator in full-time employment should be given sufficient time away from that job to carry out the coordination work;

(f) The pool of experts should be maintained, but efforts should be made to clarify the commitments that its members make to the work, to improve communications with them and to keep them informed;

(g) It will be important for work to begin very early in the second cycle to address some gaps in knowledge, to establish quantified baselines and to improve methods of integrated assessment;

(h) There should be an early round of regional workshops, which should involve the members of the pool of experts, and which should enable dialogue on what World Ocean Assessment I has delivered and how the work described in item (e) should be organized;

(i) Methods of communication should be improved between members of the Group of Experts and with the members of the pool of experts, as well as with both the scientific community and the general public. To that end, the website should have a designated manager and a relevant social media presence should be developed. It would also help if the designation of national contact points were considered;

(j) The secretariat should be strengthened so that it can provide technical and scientific support on the work described in item (e), ensure proper follow-up to regional workshops and develop means of communication;

(k) Provision should be made in the second cycle for meetings of small groups of experts engaged in specific projects or producing components for World Ocean Assessment II. If writing teams are used for the second cycle, there should be meetings of at least some of those teams;

(l) Resources should be available to purchase access to commercial databases and periodicals and other publications from which information is not freely available.

(*Signed*) Lorna **Inniss**

(*Signed*) Alan **Simcock**

Letter dated 7 September 2015 from the Joint Coordinators of the Group of Experts addressed to the Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole

1. At the end of August 2015, through the secretariat of the Regular Process, you asked us to make a presentation during the meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Whole, from 8 to 11 September, on the Group of Experts' post-assessment evaluations of the outcomes and products of the first cycle, including, in relation to future assessments, capacity-building, resource needs, strengthening the science-policy interface, communications strategies and awareness-raising needs.

2. In May 2015, at your request, we wrote to you setting out the views of the Group of Experts on the lessons learned from the implementation of the first cycle of the Regular Process in terms of the procedures followed and the practical arrangements made. We included in that letter several proposals for improving the process for future cycles. You circulated that letter to the participants in the Working Group without the attached proposals, given that they had not been considered by the Bureau of the Working Group.

3. That letter covers the internal aspects of the workings of the Regular Process, and the Group of Experts has nothing further to add to that letter on the lessons learned regarding procedures and practical arrangements and the related resource needs.

4. The present letter, which is based on a speedy consultation of the Group of Experts, goes on to address the additional, external aspects of the Regular Process covered by your latest request. These include giving best effect to the underlying purposes of a regular integrated assessment of the marine environment, covering environmental, social and economic questions, the means for encouraging exchanges between science and policy (including enhancing the "visibility" of the issues) and the steps needed to build the capacities necessary for analysing issues, developing and implementing policies and encouraging the creation of employment in new and sustainable technologies.

5. Two distinct sets of issues can be identified. First, there is the question of what to do with the product of the first cycle. Second, there is the question of the focus of the second (and future) cycles.

6. On the question of what to do with the product of the first cycle, we stressed in our first letter that, in addition to whatever uses the General Assembly and States chose to make externally of the first global integrated marine assessment, there was a crucial internal function to consider: maintaining commitment from marine experts to support and participate in future cycles of the Regular Process. We consider that the way in which States and intergovernmental organizations take the first assessment into account will have a great impact in that regard. If little international attention is given and no clear actions are taken with regard to World Ocean Assessment I, marine experts will be very reluctant to commit their time and effort to future cycles.

7. Although this "internal" question is significant, the "external" aspects are much more important. As part I (summary) of World Ocean Assessment I shows, the world's ocean is facing major pressures simultaneously on many different fronts. Concerted actions are needed if those pressures, individually and cumulatively, are

not to undermine the capacity of the ocean to support human well-being and conserve biological diversity.

8. We suggest that one way of encouraging such concerted action would be for the General Assembly to draw the attention of the specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations system to World Ocean Assessment I and to invite them to inform the Assembly of how their current programmes of work address the issues identified and what changes they might consider in the light of the assessment.

9. Furthermore, it is critical that an analysis be undertaken of any gaps in addressing the challenges highlighted in World Ocean Assessment I that fall between the work of the various specialized agencies and programmes. UN-Oceans would perhaps be best placed to carry out such a gap analysis, although some external input could also be useful.

10. The responses of the specialized agencies and programmes, together with the gap analysis, could then provide the basis for the General Assembly to review the situation and to take or to propose any actions that might be desirable. The United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea could perhaps play a part in preparing such discussions in the Assembly.

11. As another aspect of the "internal" question of maintaining the commitment of marine experts, we noted in our letter of May 2015 that a further round of regional workshops was desirable. Regional workshops have drawn a lot of local attention, and can provide very positive feedback. In addition to drawing greater attention to World Ocean Assessment I, future workshops would present opportunities to discuss the next cycle of the Regular Process in the light of the outcomes of the assessment and previous workshops.

12. The above-mentioned round of regional workshops could also play an important part in the "external" aspect, provided that the regional workshops involve not only a sufficient diversity of marine experts (from both the natural sciences and the social sciences) but also policymakers. That would enable policymakers and marine experts to engage with each other on the issues of importance to the region. Such engagement is important if concrete actions at the regional level are to result from World Ocean Assessment I, and if future cycles of the Regular Process are to further increase its value. The guidelines for workshops agreed upon by the Working Group and endorsed by the General Assembly would need to be modified if that approach were to be adopted.

13. An important element of World Ocean Assessment I has been the identification of gaps in knowledge and in capacities (and of the related opportunities for capacity-building and technology transfer) both for assessment and management purposes. It therefore seems important that the follow-up should pay special attention to the task of addressing those gaps. The initial inventory of capacity-building compiled by the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea can be a useful basis for this task. It seems that there is a need for coordination of actions to fill gaps in information collection and capacity-building in order to ensure adequate coverage and avoid overlap. The specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations system have an important role to play here, and an inter-secretariat group from specialized agencies and programmes, such as UN-Oceans, could serve as a useful forum for coordination. Specific requests to these organizations for such action would seem appropriate.

14. On the question of how the second cycle should be managed, the Working Group recommended, in 2009, that the aim of the first cycle should be to provide a baseline. For that reason, the agreed outline for World Ocean Assessment I aimed to ensure that it produced a comprehensive and coherent overview. A primary function of future cycles is then to examine trends in relation to that baseline.

15. To facilitate that, we suggest addressing the following four issues:

(a) First, where regional sea organizations exist, we think that they need to be brought into a closer relationship with the Regular Process. Where regional assessments are appropriate, work at the regional level should be strengthened to produce regional assessments, using a common methodology, as inputs to the global synthesis. That methodology should, among other things, encourage regional assessments to identify the changes observed in comparison with World Ocean Assessment I. In cases where national assessments only are appropriate, States could be invited to adopt similar approaches. On that basis, the second cycle could start from sets of identified changes, rather than having to identify changes from scratch. That would allow more effort to be devoted to the integration of the assessment;

(b) Second, based on the suggested systematic review of gaps, regional assessments should also address the material and actions that would fill knowledge gaps identified in World Ocean Assessment I;

(c) Third, the focus of the Regular Process on capacity-building implies that there should be a coherent approach to reporting on progress in capacity-building specifically;

(d) Fourth, we remind the Working Group that, for the first cycle, the agreed approach, endorsed by the General Assembly, was to organize the assessment simultaneously by ecosystem services, by human activities and (within biodiversity) both by species groups and by habitats. The body chosen to take the expert lead in the next cycle should initially concentrate efforts on simplifying the structure in order to enhance the integration and the policy-relevant aspects of the second assessment as a whole.

16. In other words, the second cycle could be organized to address a relatively small number of topics that are of high priority from a policy perspective. For those topics, the assessment could be designed to evaluate trends in key metrics since World Ocean Assessment I was conducted, cross-cutting drivers of change and gaps that were revealed during, and subsequent to, World Ocean Assessment I. If appropriately focused, the second cycle could require less effort and result in a shorter document.

(*Signed*) Lorna **Inniss**

(*Signed*) Alan **Simcock**